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Tempo of NASA Deals On Ranger Is Set

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The apparent molasses-in-January tempo of dealings between the space agency and one of its key laboratories has drawn the fire of a congressional inquiry.

A House Space subcommittee is looking into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Ranger program, which has failed in four consecutive attempts to photograph the moon.

Another Ranger flight is set for this summer and two more for 1965.

Hearings into the Ranger program opened yesterday with Representative Karth, Democrat of Minnesota, in the chair.

Repeatedly, during testimony by a ranking NASA official, Mr. Karth broke in to question and

comment on the management of NASA.

Major Research Center

The negotiations involve the agency's headquarters here and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif. JPL is operated for NASA as a major research center by California Institute of Technology under a unique contractual arrangement.

Dr. Homer E. Newell, director of NASA's Office of Space Sciences and Applications explained that a new contract has been under negotiation with JPL since last fall.

The two-year contract would eliminate a so-called "mutuality clause" in an existing three-year JPL-NASA agreement which in effect gives the laboratory the right to veto orders from headquarters.

Dr. Newell said he could not recall an area where mutuality has been a substantive problem in any project. However, he conceded under questioning by Mr. Karth that it sometimes takes longer to get NASA orders executed at JPL than at the eight centers operated as an integral part of NASA.

Two Years Have Elapsed

Mr. Karth's questions brought out the fact that two years have elapsed between the time a Ranger management change at JPL was demanded by NASA and the time it actually took effect. The subcommittee chairman asked how long it would take to make a similar change at NASA center.

"I could order my NASA centers to do it right away, but I usually don't do this because it is not conducive to good relations," Dr. Newell said.

The Ranger inquiry was ordered after NASA Administrator James E. Webb criticized JPL in a letter to Chairman Anderson and Miller of the Senate and House Space Committees on March 31, about two months after the last-minute failure of Ranger VI to take photos of the moon as it plummeted to destruction on the lunar surface.

Ranger Given

Priority to July

The space agency has assigned top launching-pod priority to its Ranger moon probe until late in July. After that, however, it will have to step aside for other space projects, including a double-barreled shot at the planet Mars.

According to high space officials, the next Ranger — No. 7 in the series — will not be ready before the last week in June. There are several days in that period suitable for a moon launching, after which the mission could not be carried out until the last of July.

Dr. Homer E. Newell, head of NASA's Space Science Office, and Dr. William H. Pickering, director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said yesterday that top priority had been assigned to Ranger for these two periods. The laboratory, at Pasadena, Calif., is in charge of the Ranger program.

After July, Dr. Newell said, priority will shift to a scheduled August launching of an orbiting geophysical observatory.

project of the Goddard Space Flight Center at Beltsville, Md. If the OGO, an earth satellite vehicle, does not get off the pad in August, no further attempts with either OGO or Ranger will be made before early 1965, Dr. Newell said.

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